Looking 20 Years into the Future

The Strategic Plan of the Southwestern Region
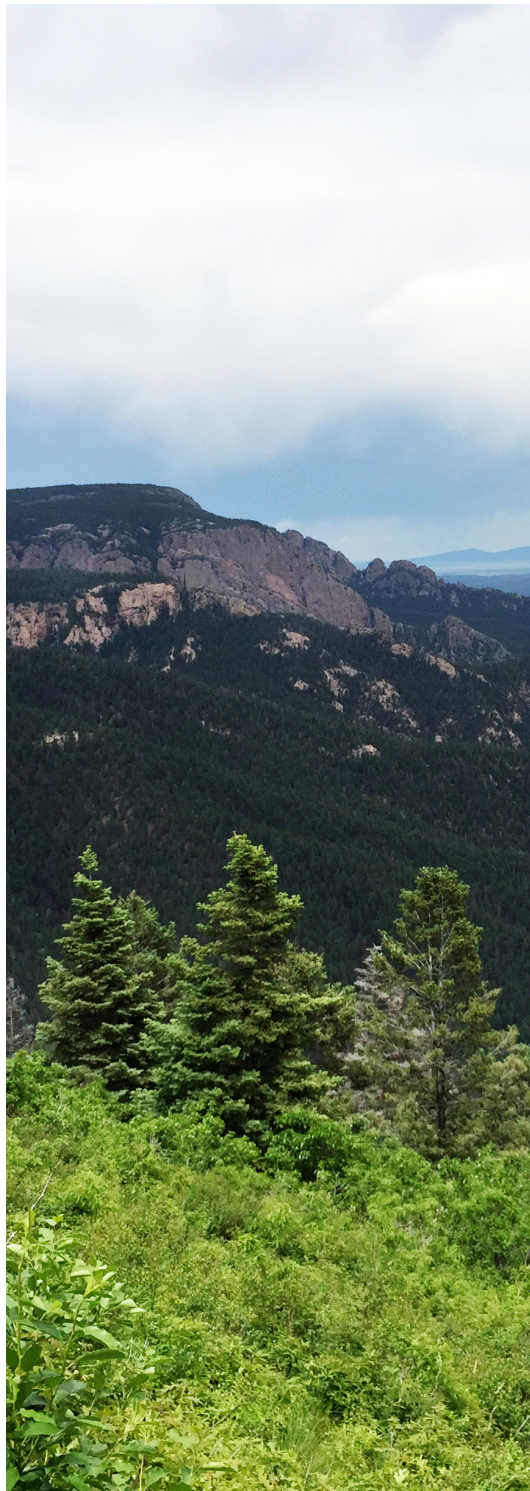
Letter From the Regional Forester

In the fall of 2020, the Southwestern Region of the USDA Forest Service recognized that the world was changing in ways more formidable than previously considered. Global environmental impacts, rapid technology advances, social unrest, and the pandemic combined to create circumstances far outside the norm. As the Region stepped up in the face of these dynamics, one decision was to invest leadership time in creating a new strategic direction for the Region equal to the coming future.

Our starting point was the guidance given to us in the Agency's Strategic Plan, as well as the values and principles expressed in This Is Who We Are. It was imperative that the Region clearly ground itself in the direction and sentiments of the Agency before exploring how to tune their expression in a strategic plan for our Region. Next, we considered in depth the forces acting upon us and our immediate world, seeking clear language to describe them, while examining both the potential risks and opportunities involved.

With the existing guidance and a shared understanding of our shifting world, we embarked on the collaborative development of Vision, Belief, and Mission statements for the Region, as well as a comprehensive new organizational structure for our mission activities. This new structure replaces the 3Rs (Restoration, Recreation, Relationships), incorporating that work into a compelling framework that represents the rich diversity and perspectives of the Region.

INTERDEPENDENCE

Of all things. People and nature. Communities and colleagues. The past, present and future.

We make the biggest difference working together— within and among our workforce of employees, contractors, volunteers, partners, and within our communities, with our sovereign neighbors, and across social lines of place, culture, and language. We are uniquely defined by place and the peoples living here, and we also must apply a global outlook if we are to continue to contribute to broad-scale ecological health. The Region's new structure for our work helps us do just this. With it, we can think much bigger about the implications of our decisions and actions, blending the local with the global.

This strategic plan: *Looking 20 Years into the Future* represents a new layer of governance that is both forward-thinking and brings the Region together across four states, 11 forests and grasslands, and 20.6 million acres, as we contribute to the Agency's service to the nation and to the world. What the plan expresses ties us together in a common effort, while we each do our own job and in our partnerships with others. This strategic plan is the Region's new charge and embarking on it together, we will harness our collective ability for the good of the southwest, the nation, and the planet.

Michiko J. Martin

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Southwestern(*)[1] Region(*) of the USDA Forest Service spans Arizona's lower Sonoran Desert at 1,600 feet above sea level to northern New Mexico's 13,171-foot Wheeler Peak. The Region hosts an abundance of wildlife, with some of the highest numbers of threatened and endangered species in the nation and unique creatures found nowhere else. The southwest's(*) aridity means both water and fire play unique and powerful roles here.

From west Texas and Oklahoma to New Mexico and Arizona, the southwest's forests, deserts, grasslands,(*) and life-infusing waterways have long been and remain home to generations who have known, treasured, and depended upon the special places here. Personal and community ties to the land range from Tribes and Pueblos here for millennia, to land grants and homesteads with centuries of history, to scores of new arrivals drawn by the climate, scenery, and unique heritage, as well as by expansive tracts of public land. The diversity in landscapes found here is matched by the diversity of perspectives, experiences, and values.

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1 Terms with specific definitions included in the glossary are so indicated the first time they are used with an asterisk.

World forces represent context and circumstances external to the Region that together create the backdrop for all we do. These forces affect our ability to carry out our mission, and in so doing, are critical for us to understand and describe as the starting point for this strategic plan. As world forces change, so must we reconsider our pathway forward.

There are four ongoing and emerging trends that present formidable challenges to the Southwestern Region's land management and public service responsibilities and impact our delivery of mission-critical work. These forces hold both risks and opportunities, which are described here to set the stage for the Region's strategic direction.

I. Global Environmental Change

Description

Humanity's worldwide demand for resources, coupled with the economic and technological means to manipulate our environment, has led to planetary-scale impacts on our global ecosystem over the last century. Our influence and impacts are growing exponentially with time, leading to what is being considered a new geologic age.(*)

Human-caused alterations to climate, decreased plant biomass available for life forms, and loss of open space are examples of critical environmental vulnerabilities. Further, options for plant and animal migrations are greatly reduced or eliminated, and introductions of non-native species and diseases are prolific. Underlying all this is reduced water availability, a lynchpin of ecosystem resilience. These factors and their impacts are amplified by global climate change, causing environmental extremes with which we are unfamiliar and underprepared to address.

Associated Risks

The pace and scale of global environmental change create risks and uncertainty for how best to fulfill the US Forest Service's mission of sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's Forests and Grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. Climate change, development, and interruption of natural processes result in drought, floods, wind, and wildfire that are uncharacteristic in scale, timing and duration. The increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events cause a host of cascading effects, such as invasive insect and disease outbreaks, that create additional pressures and the need for immediate action. The cultural, institutional,

Kaibab National Forest. USDA Forest Service photo.

and legal frameworks that the Agency operates under are, in many cases, not agile enough to adapt to this rapidly changing future. Given the extent of uncertainty, there could be a tendency toward inaction and/or continued management that is no longer appropriate to the emerging context.

Potential Opportunities

These challenges offer an excellent opportunity for the Region to leverage our expertise and resources by convening communities, colleague agencies, academia, industry, and stakeholders. In addition, the region's(*) fifty-five Tribes and Pueblos, who have millennia of experience with landscape and climate change, offer a profound resource to the Forest Service as we engage challenging decisions. The vast land base of National Forests and Grasslands(*) serves as natural infrastructure that mitigates climate change through biomass growth; captures, stores, and releases clean water; and provides access to renewable energy and other resources for our communities. Further, there is the opportunity to retain resilient and connected landscapes that function as experimental controls(*) and living laboratories(*) for cutting-edge science and technologies aimed at species conservation. Venturing into new endeavors presents the opportunity to increase our effectiveness by monitoring and learning from our actions to ensure they have the intended effects.

II. Changing Relationship with the Natural World

Description

People's relationship with nature is dynamic, constantly changing over time. The separation from producing one's own food and shelter, coupled with growing populations and shifting demographics, increased urbanization, social unrest, alternate forms of entertainment, and advances in global technologies all

continue to transform Americans' relationship with nature. In turn, this relationship has a direct impact on the perceived role and importance of public lands. The exponential growth of information on the internet has resulted in more diverse views and polarization on how land and water should be managed. Advances in recreation technology and growing urban settlements have resulted in a dramatic increase in the numbers and types of visitors to public lands, which has accelerated more recently due to the pandemic.

Wildfires in the western United States and epic weather events in other parts of the country are highlighting the fragility of nature and the planet and the degree to which humanity relies on both, not just for recreation and spiritual renewal, but for survival. Social unrest has highlighted a broad range of social injustices built into utilitarian approaches to land use, which have been the historical basis of US law and policy. The perception that land value derives from what can be taken is shifting to include that we need to sustain intact ecosystems across landscapes as the basis for what can be taken.

Two volunteers clear invasive plant species. USDA Forest Service photo by Dyan Bone.

Associated Risk

People who are increasingly detached from the land do not see themselves needing it or having a role in stewarding it. This results in a disproportionate responsibility to land managers, as well as a smaller pool of people seeking employment as stewards of the land. This imbalance risks the gradual privatization of public lands for future generations. Many US Forest Service guiding regulations and policies, including our appropriation framework, are at odds with a shift away from a primary focus on what is taken from the land. Our current systems and structures often impede proactive stewardship that is responsive to the diverse views of how public lands should be used, managed, and conserved. Additionally, the wide range of peoples living in and visiting the southwest calls for heightened interest in and respect for their differing relationships with the natural world. Without this, we risk missing important perspectives, knowledge, relationships, and opportunities, as well as intensifying people's disconnection from public lands. Finally, should recent increases in public land visitation persist, there is the risk that our existing infrastructure is inadequate to ensure the public's safety and the protection of natural resources. On the whole, how we define and manage for sustainability(*)—how we use the land—must evolve to ensure the land can meet the needs of future generations.

Guadalupe River, Santa Fe National Forest. Forest Service photo by Monique Duke.

Former Regional Forester, Cal Joyner plants flowers at a community garden. USDA Forest Service photo by Monique Duke.

Potential Opportunities

With increased visitation—in many cases from first-time visitors—there is a significant opportunity for the Region to promote understanding of and connection to the land. Greater appreciation of the natural world and our evolving part in it result from meaningful interactions. These include offering direct experiences of land stewardship and different ways to share stories and perspectives with the peoples who live, work, visit and recreate here. Involving partners of all kinds enables us to reach the many diverse communities and peoples of the southwest, with whom we can ensure wise use—whether for commercial, recreational, therapeutic, spiritual or sustenance purposes—of our public lands. Youth engagement can stimulate the next generation's interest in and ownership of public lands, creating future advocates for the Agency's multi-faceted efforts to care for the land and serve the people. As we become ever more sensitive to the communities with whom we share this region and its natural resources on which we all depend, opportunities increase to fully achieve the shared stewardship role.

Description

For over half a century now, computing power has doubled every two years – stunning validation of a 1965 prediction that surprises even Intel founder Gordon Moore, who made it. While it is unlikely this rate will continue forever, the pace of new technology, applications, and devices outstrips the wheels of government. As examples, big data (LiDAR, modeling) and crowd sourcing tools (Nature Mapping) have significant potential utility in decision-making, but often are not supported by Agency systems. Also, ongoing trends in workplace reconfiguration, including smart offices, touch-free and remote work, are no longer a distant future due to the pandemic. Even basic field functions, such as campground operations, can be transformed by emerging technologies (automated kiosks, self-cleaning toilets). These are only a few of the technological changes having profound implications for business operations, land use and management, travel and recreation, science, education, and more. With technological advances come increasingly higher public expectations for both efficiency and sophistication in service delivery.

Technology is a force so sweeping and continuous that it creates a need for updated regulations and policies, as well as proactive strategies. At the same time, the population of the southwest includes many communities with limited access to technology. So, as technology continues to evolve exponentially, it's essential for the Region to develop a culture in which rapid technological change is the norm, while continuing to bridge to communities with less access.

Communication towers atop the Sandia Mountains, Cibola National Forest. Shutterstock photo by Rory Eye.

Associated Risks

The current state of approval and procurement processes and network security concerns cause governmental adoption of new technologies to significantly lag the private sector(*) and the public at large. The associated risks are reduced timeliness and quality of services and the resulting frustration of customers and partners. Additionally, the Agency risks losing opportunities to innovate in service delivery, increase employee safety, minimize costs of mission-critical work, and benefit from advances in science. Ultimately, we risk our ability to achieve critical ecological goals made possible by emerging technologies.

The rate of change in technology coupled with the out-of-pace rate of technology adoption (and procurement of out-moded solutions) creates the risk of a workforce(*) with less technological savvy and capability than the public we serve. This erodes public trust and adversely impacts our ability to recruit and retain top talent in the Agency. As well, our cultural "can-do" attitude can result in makeshift solutions geared to the moment, with the risk of added workload and lost data in the future. Additionally, there can be resistance to adopting new technologies and to investing the time needed to learn them, with the risk of falling behind and loss of future efficiency. Finally, we tend toward a reactive stance to new land-use technologies (e.g., drones, e-bikes, etc.), with the risks of negative resource impacts, safety issues, and public impatience.

Potential Opportunities

There is a tremendous opportunity for the Agency and government at large to develop technology approval and deployment strategies that keep pace with the private sector since the appropriate use of technology can benefit every area of our work. Technology opportunities abound: how we interact with the public; what our workforce can accomplish in the field and the office; how we automate systems and processes; and how we share scientific findings and applications. Potential gains include improved relations and confidence with employees and the public, maximized efficiencies that reduce workforce vulnerability and needs, and increased productivity and morale. In the Region, virtual technologies offer opportunities to re-engineer organizational structure in ways that lead to increased savings and service to the public. Further, technology has the potential to enable us to deliver the resources required by the nation in a way that transforms our relationship with the natural world. As well, the Region has the opportunity to support rural communities through expedited methods to approve technological infrastructure, such as broadband and cellular. We can also offer technical assistance for utilizing virtual platforms to interact with the Region (online applications, comment submission). The Region can explicitly explore coming and available technologies, as well as more rapid deployment to support innovations that will enable us to retain our role as leaders in securing the future of our natural resources.

IV. Appropriations and Expectations

Description

US Forest Service work is guided by expectations from Congress, the USDA, the public, and special interest groups. New and more diverse land uses continue to evolve, leading to higher expectations and demands, which shift from year to year. Managing the Nation's Forests and Grasslands and providing services to the public involve a growing variety of specialty fields and expertise, all of which require funding. Congress allocates funding to the Agency based on expectations generally inferred by outputs (targets such as acreage and board feet). For long periods budgets remain flat, and then in other years, Congress provides an influx of funding to address particular initiatives. Recent examples include the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, additional funds for Wildfire Suppression and Recovery, the Great American Outdoors Act, and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act signed into law in November 2021. This means that while some aspects of the US Forest Service receive an influx of funding, others may not. Such circumstances mean that the Agency faces unprecedented challenges in how to achieve the entirety of its mission-critical work.

Mitten Ridge, Coconino National Forest. USDA Forest Service photo by Doug Madison.

Associated Risks

The waxes and wanes of both allocations and expectations put at risk the US Forest Service's ability to accomplish all that is needed to manage the lands under our stewardship. Traditionally, it has been difficult for the Agency to shift priorities and needed capacity swiftly enough to meet allocation trends. Earmarked allocations can come and go quickly. For a program area to go from flat budgets to sudden, large inflows of funding or, conversely, from an influx to a flat or declining budget make successful planning and execution more challenging. Further, the ebb and flow of funding trends can result in reactive approaches to what are long-term dynamics on the landscape, with minimal benefit, or worse, adverse impacts.

In turn, compromised ability to be responsive to growing expectations erodes public trust and risks diminished allocations. In addition, measuring accomplishments in outputs instead of outcomes inadvertently places the focus on quantitative work (acres treated, for example) rather than on much-needed qualitative work (watershed resilience, for example). The constant shifts in focus, as well as targets that are often disconnected from meaningful impacts on the land, can adversely affect workforce morale, with the risk of growing attrition. Finally, the increasing costs of the wildfire

Silver City Hot Shots, Taylor Creek and Klondike Fires, Rogue-Siskiyou NF, OR, 2018

organization, though needed, risk decreased investment in other programs. Ultimately, we risk the demise of the critical conservation work accomplished by the Agency. If we are not nimble enough in the face of budgetary shifts and associated expectations, great opportunities for investment and achievement are at risk of being missed.

Opportunities

The Region has the opportunity to increase its agility regarding budget allocations, whether that means greater focus and innovative approaches during leaner funding cycles or being prepared to fast-track initiatives that meet the requirements of specialized influxes of funding. This agility depends on creating an investment strategy that is forward-thinking and aligned with the Region's Strategic Plan, in which a range of priorities are at-the-ready. For example, the Plan outcomes of fire prevention in key firesheds, collaborative restoration of shared watersheds, and increased visitor infrastructure capacity are all applicable to the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. With the slate of strategic outcomes included in this Plan, the Region is poised to rapidly deploy these funds in locations of high priority. By emphasizing outcomes first, along with related outputs, we can achieve strategic work that makes a difference.

In all funding scenarios, the Region engages with others in a cross-boundary, shared stewardship model that provides substantial opportunities to benefit the land. Through partnerships with our communities, colleague agencies, non-governmental organizations, cooperators, and local and international governments, we can leverage a broad range of resources and funding streams. This increases the Region's resilience in the face of shifting Congressional allocations. We can also positively influence expectations through our relationships and broaden the public's awareness of the US Forest Service's role related to species protection, water production, recreation, and research. Additionally, we can bring increased rigor to maintaining the strategic balance between our mission priorities and our capacity requirements (that is, workforce, funding, technology, infrastructure, governance,(*) and image) to ensure our readiness, no matter the situation.

World Forces Conclusion

Our current world is, in many ways, far from the one in which the US Forest Service was founded. The broad forces affecting us now are the changing climate and environment, marked by uncharacteristic floods, drought, wind, and fire; the rapid pace of advancing technology that affects our way of life and what we know of it; and fluctuations in funding with the trend of funding fire suppression over conservation work. Each of these forces interacts with and influences the public's ever-evolving and widely various relationship with nature.

In the southwest, when we look at the mountaintops, some people see ancient summer homeland and holy places. Others see high pasture, firewood for the hearth, and habitat for animals. Some see the raw materials, such as minerals and timber, demanded by the American standard of living, and others see an abundant playground, rich with possibilities to recreate. Still others see the wild nature of our world as sanctuary, playing a larger role within a global ecosystem. As the public's steward of National Forest System lands, the Southwestern Region is charged with balancing these many and often opposing perspectives with the long-term sustainability of the land.

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In the face of all this, the primary risk indicated here is the inability to fulfill the entirety of the US Forest Service mission. This risk can be both confounding and debilitating. But with a clear-eyed look at each world force, we see a common opportunity emerge: innovation. The call to the Region is for ongoing evaluation and transformation of our ways of doing business, as well as of the cultural assumptions and norms from which they spring. This does not mean a complete reinvention, but rather careful consideration of the Region's strengths and capabilities that may be brought more to the fore, as well as where we will benefit from growth as we explore new approaches to our work.

Fortunately, the Southwestern Region is one of grit and adaptation. We are known as the Innovation Region because we are comfortable with—even inspired by—trying new things. And when we find something that works, we incorporate it into our way of doing business. We keep ourselves agile and current in the face of change through our interactions with all those who work with and depend on the land. This strategic plan outlines the path forward.
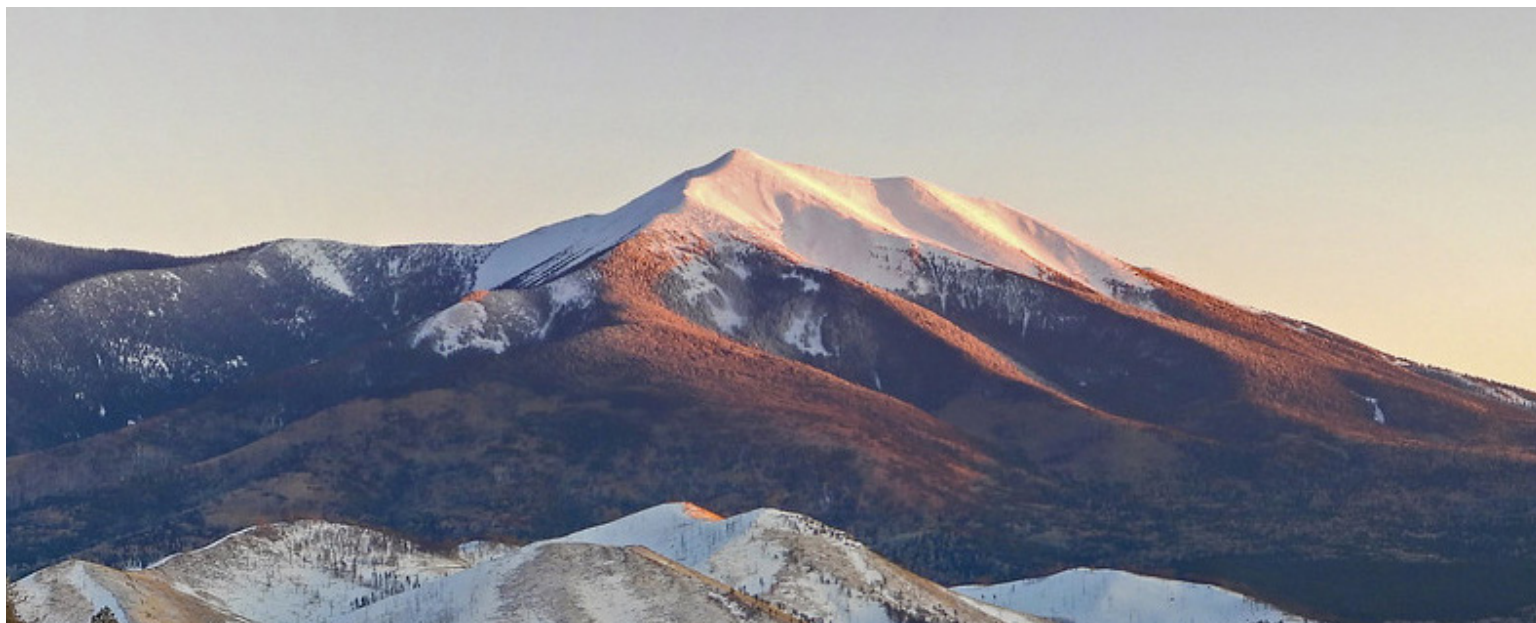
Humphrey Peak, San Francisco Peaks, Coconino National Forest, USDA Forest Service photo by Brady Smith.

Southwestern Region's Vision, Beliefs, and Mission

In developing the Region's strategic plan, the question arose, does the Region need its own vision and mission statements, as well as core belief statements? While it is imperative that the Region's strategic plan well aligns with the aspiration and direction coming from the Department and the Agency, it is also important that the Region articulate how these are shaped by and expressed in the unique landscape and culture of the forests and grasslands here.

Thus, the Region's vision statement is aspirational and expresses what we are ultimately working toward in the special landscapes of the southwest. The core belief statements clarify foundational understanding of the world that is essential to our work here. Finally, the mission statement specifically describes how we will reach for the vision. These statements together provide the basis for the Region's response to the world forces and for the focus of our work in the coming years.

VISION STATEMENT

The peoples of the iconic American Southwest care for its treasured landscapes as an essential and continuous legacy.

CORE BELIEFS

Water is the keystone of caring for the lands of the Southwest.

Land stewardship evolves, anchored in science and place-based experience.

Many voices balance multiple uses in service to resilient nature.

MISSION STATEMENT

As the public's steward, we join forces with communities in the work of sustaining southwestern forests and grasslands.

Our Vision statement:

The peoples of the iconic American Southwest care for its treasured landscapes as an essential and continuous legacy.

This statement captures the fundamental importance of the many cultures that make up and interact in the southwest. As well, it recognizes this place's cherished status, not only for the people here, but for many around the world. The vision statement's aspiration is that those who know and love this land will ensure its ongoing existence into the future.

Our core beliefs:

Water is the keystone of caring for the lands of the Southwest.

Land stewardship evolves, anchored in science and place-based experience.(*)

Many voices balance multiple uses(*) in service to resilient nature.

The Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service holds many values and beliefs as important to who we are and what we do. Of these, there are three primary beliefs that serve as pillars for how we work here. First and foremost, water is inseparable from all decisions and actions concerning the land. Its scarcity has defined life in the southwest for eons and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. National Forest System lands are the primary source of waters that nurture and sustain life in the arid southwest. Second,

we understand that our decisions today have consequences for the future, which we may come to know only then. It is therefore essential that we consider the long-term consequences of our actions, learning and evolving what we know as an ongoing practice. Finally, our devotion to the land is based on our need for it. These needs are various and often competing so, through the involvement of many, our decisions are strengthened.

Our Mission statement:

As the public's steward, we join forces with communities in the work of sustaining Southwestern Forests and Grasslands.

The mission statement expresses the essential role of the US Forest Service: that of steward of National Forest System lands on behalf of the American people. Again, here in the southwest, our interdependence is woven into the fabric of our storied history and persists more than ever today. As well, the land itself is connected across fence lines by waterways, migratory patterns, and soil and plant structure. We can only fully achieve our mission of sustaining these lands by working together with the people who live and visit here.

Volunteers and Forest Service employees work together on stewardship projects. USDA Forest Service Photos.

A New Structure for the Region's Work

The Region's Mission Work

The Southwestern Region's mission work covers a wide and growing array of activities. One of the challenges of a strategic plan is appropriately addressing the totality of what the Region does while giving sufficient direction as to current priorities. One way the strategic plan does this is by organizing all the mission work into a coherent structure. Obviously, there are various ways for how the work could be structured. The value of a strategic plan is selecting the structure that supports an approach to our work that best equips us for the future we currently face.

To that end, the Region is adopting a structure for its mission work based on the scale of impact of its actions. Specifically, the Southwestern Region's actions affect three nested spheres of impact:

1. the southwest region in which we work,

2. the nation to which we contribute resources,

3. and the globally connected ecosystems of which we are a part.

In response to shifting global changes, technology advances, and social relationships with nature, organizing our mission work under these three broad scales of impact enables the Region to consider the longer-term and broader consequences of our actions. In keeping with our core beliefs, this structure helps us bring more intentional consideration of our decision-making—both its inclusivity and its forward-thinking—to ensure our actions result in what we intend.

This new structure is a departure from that of the three Rs (Restoration, Recreation, and Relationships), which we have used for the past five years. This departure is deliberate. To keep abreast of our changing world, we benefit from new thinking from time to time. This does not mean that the work related to the three Rs is complete or obsolete. Instead, this work is incorporated throughout the new structure, integrated, and expanded in new ways.

Another advantage of this new structure based on scale of impact is how it benefits our workforce. By explicitly seeing the breadth and long-term effects of the Region's work, our employees tap into a greater sense of purpose. This includes how their work contributes to something bigger than themselves and even the communities in which they work. This sense of mission and far-reaching purpose has the potential to motivate our workforce in entirely new ways, retaining and attracting the types of people the Region needs.
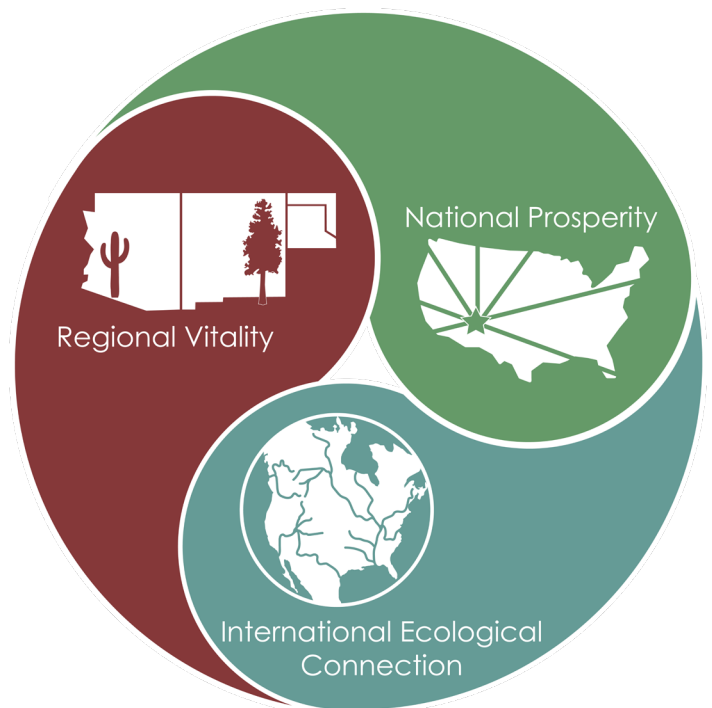
The interdependent relationship of the three Focus Areas is depicted here.

Three Areas of Mission Focus

The *Regional Vitality* focus area is an integrated set of objectives that represent the work that focuses across the Southwestern Region – the activities that specifically benefit the landscapes, communities, and businesses in the southwest. Most of the region's population live in major urban centers such as Albuquerque and Phoenix and interact with the National Forests largely with a recreation focus. Yet, there is a substantial land base with rural communities that have deep roots and traditional cultural connections. These communities are often near National Forests and Grasslands and view their resources as fundamental to their way of life. The Southwestern Region of the Forest Service is committed to serving both rural and urban communities and to bridging their broad range of interests, which includes a reliance (even if unconscious) on the ecosystem services (air, water, soils) generated by public lands. In particular, the US Forest Service is attentive to benefitting traditionally disadvantaged(*) and underserved(*) communities wherever possible, especially those at greater risk of ecological changes and lacking adaptive capacity. This regional focus area contains most of what our communities see of our work, and as a result, is perhaps the most familiar to them of the three areas of Mission focus.

The *National Prosperity* focus area daylights the big resource contributions the Region is expected to make for the benefit of the Nation. This work of the Region may be invisible to much of the public but is critical to supporting the country and to fulfilling a core part of the Agency's mandate. For instance, issuing special use permits for mining, energy development or telecommunications is time-intensive and can be contentious, but all these activities are required by the US Forest Service's authorizing legislation and demanded by our national standard of living (cell phones, broadband, automobiles). At the same time, we are responsible for preserving the southwest's iconic landscapes as key to our national and ecological heritage. This area of focus helps to illuminate the Agency's multiple-use mandate, bringing greater awareness to the challenging decisions and actions associated with it. As well, this focus area opens to the opportunities for innovation that reduce the impacts from these uses.

The *International Ecological Connection* focus area provides the stance to the Region's work that involves the larger ecological scale (e.g., migration corridors, waterways, and contiguous soils) demanded by global environmental change and its impacts, as well as for partnering with others at this scale. The Sonoran Desert and Madrean Pine-Oak Woodlands are examples of important and treasured ecosystems that span our border with Mexico, and watersheds are examples of vital resources that cross boundaries with Tribes, Pueblos, land grant communities and acequias. As discussed in the World Forces above, the scale of ecological change now is global, so to meaningfully respond to its climatic change effects, we must work across international boundaries with approaches tuned to this scale. The US Forest Service has a specific trust responsibility(*) for protecting Tribal treaty rights, lands, assets, and resources, and sharing decision-making with Tribes and Pueblos. This trust responsibility within the nation-to-nation relationship goes beyond the Region's responsibilities to other communities, partners, and permittees. An added benefit of this focus area is an expanded mindset for the Region in how we engage the vital sovereign entities of the southwest with whom we share land stewardship responsibility, no matter in which focus area the work falls.

Mission Objectives and Outcomes

There are 21 Mission Outcomes included in this Strategic Plan, split among the three Areas of Focus. The Outcomes address the breadth of work involved with sustaining the Forests and Grasslands of the Southwestern Region, while providing clear focus on accomplishments that can be realized in a three-to-five-year timeframe. For example, while work on invasive grasses is ongoing across the Region, one of the Plan's Outcomes directs that this work be focused over the next three to five years on preventing invasive grasses in intact desert areas to protect this fragile ecosystem from fire. With all units together taking up this charge, the probability of accomplishing it vastly increases.

The Mission Outcomes fall under longer-term Objectives, which describe what the Region intends to achieve over the next two decades. The relationship between longer-term objectives (10-20 years) and the nearer-term outcomes (3-5 years) is intended to represent the scale of time required to achieve lasting change on the landscape. The Outcomes are aspects of the Objectives that the Region considers both achievable and critical first steps in making progress toward the objectives. Some objectives have more than one outcome, indicating that there are different aspects of the objective that are considered priority in the next three to five years.

While 21 outcomes may appear to add to an already full plate of activities, in fact, these outcomes provide clear direction and focus for existing work, so that major achievements may be collectively accomplished. As each outcome falls under a longer-term objective, when that outcome is complete, additional outcomes toward achievement of the objective will be developed. In this way, the Region has a shared approach to achieving long-term gains on the landscape, taking one step at a time.

Leadership's intent is that various outcomes will be approached together, with support by way of tools and information made available by the appropriate Regional Office (RO) programs. Units will identify which outcomes are most relevant to their lands and will focus work in alignment with their Forest Plans and other unit direction. Further, it will be advantageous to identify those locations where work accomplished can serve multiple outcomes, thereby creating greater return on the unit's investment. Finally, these outcomes are written as true outcomes; they do not specify tactics for achieving them. Tactical plans for accomplishing the outcomes will be developed as part of the unit and RO program of work, including consideration of ongoing maintenance to prevent losses of Mission Outcome gains.

The Mission Objectives and Outcomes are listed here, including brief explanations of each to ensure clarity for implementation.

Petroglyphs at V Bar V Ranch, Coconino National Forest. USDA Forest Service photo by Deborah Soltesz.

Regional Vitality

The Region supports rural and urban communities and economies.

6 Objectives, 8 Outcomes.

Obj I. 1: Ecosystem structure and composition fosters disturbance processes that play their ecological role. By 2042

Outcome A (5 yrs): Forest structure in priority firesheds is such that fire behavior is within its desired regime

Explanation: the intent here is that the Region will identify its priority firesheds from existing data sources – including work with States, partners and others, and this will narrow the outcome sufficiently to accomplish it. Also, forest structure will determine appropriate fire regime.

Outcome B (3 yrs): Naturally intact desert areas are free from invasive grasses such that fire does not spread.

Explanation: the fragility of deserts and their threat from fire carried by invasive grasses is the core of this outcome. Identification of naturally intact desert areas is a requirement of this outcome.

Obj I. 2: The recreation economy reliant on the National Forests and Grasslands is ecologically sustainable. By 2037

Outcome C (3 yrs): Opportunities provided by the Region to recreation businesses model innovative, sustainable practice around water use and impacts.

Explanation: the intent here is that the Region frame its permitting of water-dependent businesses (includes: ski areas, concessionaires, lake & river outfitters) such that business operations are sustainable given increased visitor demand, water scarcity, and overall climate change.

Obj I. 3: Visitors to the Region have opportunities consistent with what is publicized and what the land can provide, now and into the future. By 2032

Outcome D (5 yrs): The Region's public offerings (roads, trails, facilities) in high-use areas are sustainable and meet US Forest Service standards.

Explanation: "Public offerings" means those being used by visitors to National Forest System lands. The intent of this outcome is that what the Region offers to visitors has been reviewed for its sustainability

on the landscape and that what visitors encounter meet our standards, starting in high-use areas. This outcome addresses the expectations of the GAOA and IIJA while reducing deferred maintenance.

Obj I. 4: Adverse impacts from dispersed recreation are eliminated in sensitive ecological and cultural areas. By 2031

Outcome E (5 yrs): Adverse impacts from dispersed recreation(*) in critical riparian T&E habitats are eliminated.
Explanation: the intent here is to be more deliberate about the types and seasons of dispersed recreation (including OHVs) on the landscape, and to focus first on eliminating impacts in riparian T&E habits as a subset of sensitive ecological areas. Then address other sensitive ecological areas (e.g., other T&E habitats, sensitive plant species, RNAs), cultural areas (e.g., historic dwellings, artifacts, rock art), as well as those that are sensitive for sociopolitical reasons (e.g., target shooting near communities).

Outcome F (5 yrs): Recreation opportunities are concentrated in the Urban Interface to minimize impacts to fragile desert ecosystems.
Explanation: Many desert resources can be impacted by even low levels of recreational use. Concentrating and directing public use where possible in the Urban Interface will protect remote habitat.

Obj I. 5: Livestock grazing systems are adapted to be consistent with changes in climate. By 2032

Outcome G (3 yrs): Management of allotments with T&E species habitat emphasizes the recovery and diversity of species.
Explanation: The purpose of focusing first on allotments with T&E species is to align the grazing systems with conditions and disturbances caused by climate change and pressures from other grazing wildlife.

Obj I. 6: Impacts to the Region from all species of unauthorized livestock are eliminated. By 2042

Outcome H (5 yrs): Unauthorized livestock are removed from the Region where there are impacts to T&E species and/or habitat.
Explanation: The intent here is to address an exponentially increasing impact to the Southwestern Region, starting with a focus on T&E species habitat. According to Federal regulation, unauthorized livestock include cattle, sheep, goats, hogs or equines not defined as a wild free-roaming horse or burros.

National Prosperity

The Region's resources contribute to the Nation's quality of life.

5 Objectives, 5 Outcomes

Obj II. 1: Headwaters(*) function at their inherent potential. By 2042

Outcome A (5 yrs): Priority watersheds identified in Watershed Condition Framework are producing increased water quality and quantity.
Explanation: The protection of key water sources in the southwest and their climate resilience is the purpose of this outcome.

Obj II. 2: The Region's wood supply is an established choice in the marketplace. By 2035

Outcome B (5 yrs): The Region's wood products advance emerging markets for underutilized material.
Explanation: Given the region's aridity, our wood supply is smaller and of lesser value in the current marketplace; this outcome is about connecting with and supporting innovation that leads to new markets for products that utilize our supply.

Obj II. 3: Mining projects are jointly conceived to drive ecological protection and reclamation. By 2032

Outcome C (3 yrs): Affected watersheds are the focus of shared reclamation and restoration outcomes.
Explanation: The the intent here is to bring diverse perspectives into the planning of mining projects (e.g., Tribes, conservation groups, communities) to promote increased understanding and decrease impacts from development and operations. Then collaborate on restoration and reclamation outcomes funded by the mining companies at sub-watershed or watershed scales.

Obj II 4: The Nation's energy and telecommunications demands are met by ecologically sound means. By 2032

Outcome D (5 yrs): Rural communities have access to broadband.
Explanation: The The intent is to elevate the Region's contribution to the National commitment to underserved communities, specifically facilitating broadband providers in areas of need.

Obj II 5: The iconic Sonoran Desert type is recovered. By 2042

Outcome E (5 yrs): Saguaro Cactus population increases to the level that sustains the ecosystem.
Explanation: The the intent here is the immediate focus on at-risk Sonoran desert as a treasured southwestern landscape of the Nation, with the outcome focus on saguaro cactus as a keystone species for the ecosystem. Tying in with other entities working on this enables us to refine strategies and actions.

International Ecological Connection

The Region's landscapes advance the health of globally connected ecosystems.

6 Objectives, 8 Outcomes

Obj III. 1: The Region's three primary landscapes (desert, grasslands, mountains) are connected to cross-border ecosystems to support global environmental health. By 2037

Outcome A (5 yrs): Watersheds shared with Tribal Nations, Pueblos, land grant communities, acequias and Mexico are in optimal functioning condition.

Explanation: The focus here is large-scale ecosystem management that can only be accomplished by cross-boundary work. This outcome focuses on watersheds shared with sovereign entities, as vital to life in the southwest. "Optimal" here means the best condition we can achieve, while reaching for "good" as defined in our Watershed Condition Framework.

Obj III. 2: Contiguous grassland open spaces are protected from conversion to other uses to the extent needed for the conservation of this ecosystem. By 2032

Outcome B (4 yrs): Key grassland wildlife habitat is connected across jurisdictional boundaries.
Explanation: The outcome focus on connecting key wildlife habitat areas across the grasslands of the Region is an obvious and high-value starting point that ensures ecosystem continuity.

Obj III. 3: Managed vegetation species are viable under changing climate conditions to sequester carbon and help mitigate climate change impacts. By 2042

Outcome C (5 yrs): Key areas at risk for type conversion from high-severity burns are reforested.
Explanation: The intent of this outcome is on preventing type conversion as a result of high-intensity fires where feasible, advantageous and strategically important. This outcome and the objective are informed by the broader Climate Adaptation Strategy(*) of considering potential climate change impacts in land management decisions.

Obj III. 4: Aquatic habitats that function as corridors and refugia for biodiversity thrive. By 2042

Outcome D (3 yrs): Eastern red cedar populations are eliminated in Grassland riparian areas.
Explanation: The rationale of this outcome's focus on eastern red cedar is that focused treatments can eliminate this threat in the easternmost reaches of the Region before it expands. While this currently only affects the National Grasslands of the Region, addressing it now can prevent its proliferation, like that of Tamarisk and Buffalo grass.

Outcome E (5 yrs): Unintended physical barriers to aquatic T&E species movement and dispersal are modified to allow passage.
Explanation: Some physical barriers to species dispersal and migration are intentional, however, the focus of this outcome is on identifying and removing Forest Service-caused infrastructure that undesirably prevents aquatic species passage.

Outcome F (5 yrs): Soils are stable near springs, playas, and streams.
Explanation: The intent here is that soil stability is key to water quality and quantity, so all methods to stabilize soils near waterways, such as fencing, vegetation, etc. are priority.

Obj III. 5: Open spaces contribute to functioning wildlife corridors and areas for migrating pollinators. By 2042

Outcome G (5 yrs): Historic flyways are unencumbered to provide for successful migrations.
Explanation: This outcome focuses on identifying and improving habitat associated with historic flyways that minimizes fragmentation to ensure migration patterns are not encumbered and those areas are more resilient to climate change impacts. Flyways are established air routes of migratory birds. Future outcomes can include corridors for ungulates and other wildlife.

Obj III. 6: The smoke emissions from uncharacteristic wildfires that affect international air quality are mitigated. By 2042

Outcome H (2 yrs): Smoke transport and burn intensity are priority considerations in burnout operations.(*)
Explanation: The intent here is that consideration of transport mitigates smoke impacts, particularly to smoke-sensitive areas, which is critical given the increase in wildfires. By considering transport prior to igniting burnouts, the Region is, in some cases, able to reduce smoke impacts from these wildfires and increase public goodwill. Also, by considering transport internationally, there are local and regional benefits.

Many strategic plans express aspirational goals and objectives to achieve the mission, but fewer also assess the requisite capacity to achieve them. Without capacity, the goals and objectives remain aspirational without becoming realistic and achievable.

In general, mission work tends to be more visible to our customers and publics, since, after all, this is what they seek from us. While capacity work tends to be more inwardly focused – for example, the Region needs adequate database information storage and technology equipment (cells phones, laptops, etc.), which the public is generally unaware of and unconcerned with. Distinguishing the Region's work that is related to building and maintaining capacity from its work related to mission accomplishments enables the Region to focus its efforts where needed, while engaging partners where the most benefit will result.

Although capacity work is about building the Region's ability to accomplish its mission activities, neither type of work is more important than the other. In fact, both capacity and mission work are vital to the success of the Region, and it is leadership's ongoing responsibility to ensure a sufficient balance between the two.

Seven Core Areas of Capacity Work

This strategic plan considers the Region's current capacity in seven core areas, with an eye to identifying the priority needs for capacity-building in each area that are necessary to achieving what this plan outlines. The seven areas of capacity are:

I. Workforce

Of all the areas of capacity, workforce is the Region's most important and valued. The people who work for the Region—as full-time or seasonal personnel, as contractors, volunteers, or partners—actualize each day the work ethic, the relationship with our communities, and the stewardship of the land that together make up the character of the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region. Not only do we think about workforce as those who are with us now, but also as an opportunity for others who will come, bringing rich experience from varied backgrounds. This capacity area involves the many aspects of maintaining an optimal workforce in the Region, from recruitment and hiring to professional development, safety, morale, efficiency and so much more. The workforce capacity area is fundamental to our ability to accomplish everything in the Strategic Plan.

II. Funding

As addressed in World Forces, funding is a constantly shifting resource, necessitating a high level of agility to move with its ebbs and flows. This capacity area covers the range of issues related to funding, including accounting, allocations, tracking and reporting. This Strategic Plan was, in part, prompted by shifts in the Agency's budgeting and accounting process (BAM) and the Region's desire to build a collective, long-term strategy to enable a nimbler stance in relation to shifts in funding opportunities.

III. Technology & Information Management

As stated in the World Forces, technology is perhaps the most rapidly advancing of all the capacity areas, while being the most influential on workforce efficiency. This capacity area covers broadly the technological needs and operations of the Region in field work (geospatial technology, field tools and applications) and in office work (business applications and tools) that increase our overall productivity and efficiency. Here again, our agility is key, as is our ability to continually learn to utilize the advancing capabilities available to us.

Restroom facility on the Cibola National Forest. USDA Forest Service photo.

IV. Infrastructure

The Region's infrastructure capacity area addresses all the physical assets(*) of the Region that support its mission work. This includes the overall land base, all facilities, roads and trails, and fleet, as well as the issues associated with maintaining and improving them. This is distinguished from those assets that are for public use, which are addressed in the Mission Outcomes. The Region's physical assets are key to our ability not only to do our job but to fulfill our role, starting first and foremost with the Forests and Grasslands we steward.


Mayor John Moore shakes hands with Kaibab National Forest Supervisor Heather Provencio. USDA Forest Service photo

V. Image

This capacity area is concerned with the public's perception of the Southwestern Region, treating it as a key asset in advancing Mission Outcomes. The image capacity area can be challenging since we are naturally attuned to how we think about our work and our organization. Yet, without public understanding and support, our work becomes that much more difficult. The image capacity area asks us to consider what do people generally understand about the Region and its role and work, and how can we enrich that understanding to further our relationships and goals.
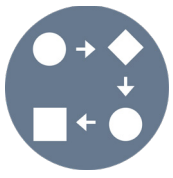
VI. Governance

The governance capacity area addresses the structure, workflows, charters, policies, plans, organizational charts, etc. that define the Region's system of decision-making, the product of which is clear decisions that drive consequential action. The capacity area of governance is one of the least considered when it comes to building institutional capability but, surprisingly, can be a major contributor to it. Clear governance promotes efficiency and productivity, and even more importantly, boosts morale. Governance that is consistent, transparent, and to which people are accountable, creates a community confident in its ability to perform well.

VII. Knowledge

The knowledge capacity area focuses on, not what we already know, but what we don't know that prevents us from decisive and effective action. Just like technology, knowledge advances, with new terminology and assumptions to express it. The knowledge developments and trends in our sector (government), our industry(*) (land/natural resource management), and in our geographical area (the southwest) are all ones the Region needs to continually keep attuned to or we risk decreased relevance. This capacity area asks us to step back and consider what broad knowledge gaps are preventing us from achieving what we intend, and then to prioritize those gaps we will intentionally address.

Range Tech, James Romero rides a pack mule in Calton Recreation Site in Pecos, NM. Forest Service photo by Andy McMillan, Team Pathways2Solutions

Capacity Objectives and Outcomes

There are 21 outcomes under the Region's seven primary areas of capacity. These outcomes address the breadth of work involved with supporting the Mission activities of the Southwestern Region, while providing clear focus on capacity accomplishments that can be realized in a three-to-five-year timeframe.

These 21 Outcomes represent the major capacity advancements needed to support the Region's accomplishment of its Mission Objectives. Like the Mission Outcomes, each Capacity Outcome falls under a longer-term Objective, such that when the Outcome is complete, additional Outcomes toward achievement of the Objective may be developed. Regional Office programs of work will address the Capacity Outcomes specific to them (e.g., Infrastructure Outcomes are addressed by Engineering), including ongoing maintenance of Capacity Outcomes as indicated. In this way, the Region has a shared approach to achieving long-term capacity gains, taking one step at a time.

The Region's Capacity Objectives and Outcomes are listed here, including brief explanations to ensure clarity for implementation.

I. Workforce (4 Objectives, 4 Outcomes)

Goal: The people who undertake our work are safe, supported and provided clear intent so they can contribute to the Region.

Obj I. 1: The Region has the ability to adjust its workforce as needed, particularly in relation to shifts in priorities and funding.

Outcome A (3 yrs): The Region's branches of Human Resources, Grants & Agreements, Contracting and the Partnership Office, with Resource Specialists, **lead a comprehensive strategy** that meets the Region's workforce capacity demands.

Explanation: The intent here is to bring increased strategic coordination and integration between the Region's primary sources of workforce capacity to ensure responsiveness to the ebb and flow of mission needs and funding opportunity through rapid ramping up of workforce where indicated.

Obj I. 2: The Region's future stability is ensured by effective leadership succession.

Outcome B (3 yrs): The Region's **pipeline of potential leaders** is continually replenished through trained employees who demonstrate leadership capability through special projects.

Explanation: The intent here is to deepen the leadership development experienced in training through applied experiences in real projects for the Region, from which the leadership pipeline is ensured. Further, the Region's investment in employee leader training is returned through special projects that benefit the Region.

Obj I. 3: The Regional workforce is oriented to the information critical to their role such that they contribute early in their assignment.

Outcome C (3 yrs): Three primary workforce groups (New Permanent Employees, Line Officers, RLT members) **are oriented** to their specific roles using established National and Regional resources.

Explanation: The intent here is that by providing consistent foundational information critical to their role means personnel can contribute quickly and efficiently. Additionally, orientation(*) is an ongoing function as things change. While orientation is critical for all members of the workforce, this Outcome starts with three groups within the Region's workforce to ensure the Outcome is accomplishable in the timeframe.

Obj I. 4: The Region's workforce reflects the makeup of the southwest.

Outcome D (3 yrs): The Region's recruitment and development efforts **focus on underrepresented populations(*)** to ensure presence and advancement in our workforce.

Explanation: The intent here is to cultivate future workforce members who bring diverse and untapped perspectives (e.g., gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic) to benefit our mission delivery. This effort emphasizes recruitment and career ladders for leadership opportunities to ensure into the future a presence representative of the southwest region we serve.

II. Funding (2 Objectives, 3 Outcomes)

Goal: Funding needs and opportunities are anticipated, including community and partner resources, and leveraged to achieve optimal benefit.

Obj II. 1. The Region is adept at aligning its Strategic Objectives/Outcomes with the range of funding opportunities.

Outcome A (3 yrs): The Region's Strategic **Plan Outcomes are funded first** in the annual Budget Direction.(*)

Explanation: The intent of this Outcome is that the Region commits to funding the Strategic Plan Outcomes first each year to ensure that accomplishments are made. The Region will start this in 2022, with the intent of ensuring that in three years' time, this is standard practice in the Region.

Obj II. 2: The timing of fund allocation and expenditure support the workflow of the Region.

Outcome B (3 yrs): The **FY budget is allocated** by the Region to the Units on or before Oct 1.

Explanation: To provide a smooth transition and begin the FY with clear intent and direction, funds are best allocated by Oct 1. While WO allocations are often not available by Oct 1, the Region's experience and knowledge give us the ability to distribute Regional allocations and then provide timely updates as WO budget direction is available. The intent of the time frame here is to ensure that by three years out, this is standard practice in the Region.

Outcome C (3 yrs): Units **execute their budgets** throughout the year based on quarterly cash flow projections to position the Region to accept and shift funds for optimal results.

Explanation: A steady flow of fund expenditure is critical to smooth operations and nimbleness in the face of shifting budgets. An early obligation strategy enables Contracting and Grants & Agreements to meet demands throughout the year, mitigating Q4 bottlenecks. Further, timely tracking of budget versus actual expenditure assures that the Region is accomplishing as projected. The intent of the time frame here is to ensure that by three years out, this is standard practice in the Region.

III. Technology and Information Management (2 Objectives, 2 Outcomes)

Goal: Technologies and information management are effectively leveraged for impact on Regional capability and mission advancement.

Obj III. 1: Institutional and specialized knowledge and data are well-curated and organized, and uniformly accessible.

Outcome A (5 yrs): The Region's **data meets current and future standards** and is accessible across the range of needs and technologies.

Explanation: The intent of this Outcome is to ensure our data matches current standards, accuracy and precision so that we are able to utilize emerging technologies and adapted workflows. For example, base layer data for LiDAR with tablets; recreation data for third party applications; procurement data for streamlined acquisitions; NRM data for better investment with partners.

Obj III. 2: Technology and best practices are proactively implemented by each unit and program to increase workforce efficiency.

Outcome B (3 yrs): Accomplishing a major business transformation applying existing technology doubles the efficiency in that area for the unit or RO program.

Explanation: The Region, in many cases, is still doing work in outmoded ways (e.g., using email instead of applications), which is causing undo workforce burden and decreased results. The intent here is that each unit and program undertake a technology enhancement of routine workflow to create greater efficiency and results. The Region will support units/programs in identifying the optimal business transformation.

IV. Infrastructure (2 Objectives, 4 Outcomes)

Goal: Infrastructure advances the Region's ability to achieve its Mission.

Obj IV. 1: The Region's infrastructure aligns with current priorities and promotes the offset of future impacts.

Outcome A (5 yrs): Priority **developed recreation infrastructure** aligns with Sustainable Recreation Principles.

Explanation: In 2015, the Forest Service created the Sustainable Recreation Principles, which include asset operation, maintenance, decommissioning, and impact on the landscape. The intent here is that each unit will establish its priorities for the next 5-year period, taking into account the Region's outcomes relating to protecting fragile habitat.

Outcome B (3 yrs): Prioritized **administrative space** is right sized for our needs.

Explanation: Given current national trends in office space reductions, fast-tracked by the pandemic, the intent here is for the Region to reach an appropriate footprint. The Regional Investment Board is charged with this, based on unit Facility Master Plans and the Asset Priority Index analysis, including consolidation, repurposing, and decommissioning.

Outcome C (3 yrs): The strategic approach to optimize the **land base** of the Region supports the achievement of Strategic Plan mission outcomes.

Explanation: The intent here is that a strategic approach to managing the Region's land base is designed such that it supports achievement of Mission Outcomes. Land base management includes acquisition, exchange, and sales, as well as consideration of boundaries, inholdings, easements, and associated water and mineral rights. (Land and Water Conservation Funds)

Obj IV. 2: The workforce has access to the necessary infrastructure (housing, fleet, equipment).

Outcome D (5 yrs): Adequate housing is available in areas with limited or high-cost rental markets.

Explanation: The intent here is to begin addressing the housing issue in areas with limited and high-cost rental markets because there are fewer apparent opportunities. This Outcome is based on the assumption that there are options to explore in addition to building housing that can be utilized, such as partnerships with ski areas, schools, and churches, or modular housing, etc.

V. Image (1 Objective, 3 Outcomes)

Goal: People value the Forest Service's multifaceted role in the conservation of healthy landscapes in the southwest.

Obj V. 1. The people of the southwest are aware of the Region's multi-faceted role and its dependency on their engagement.

Outcome A (5 yrs): The people of the southwest generally understand that one of our roles is **balancing many and often opposing uses** with the long-term sustainability of the land.

Explanation: The intent here is that when our role as arbiter between many uses and resource protection is understood, we will be better supported in Agency decisions.

Outcome B (3 yrs): The people of the southwest generally understand that one of our roles is stewardship and **protection of water** sources on National Forest lands.

Explanation: The intent here is that the public's understanding of our role in the protection of headwaters (often on Forest Service lands) will better facilitate safeguarding this resource as it becomes increasingly threatened in the context of climate change.

Outcome C (3 yrs): The people of the southwest generally understand that one of our roles is the **prevention of uncharacteristic wildfire**, not only its suppression.

Explanation: The intent here is to convey the larger restoration role of the Region that results in activities that reduce uncharacteristic wildfire and increase healthy landscapes, resilient to fire. Also, this will counteract the prevalent thinking that the Forest Service can and should put out all wildfire if only there were enough resources. This will include messaging related to smoke. An Outcome devoted to this enables the Region to reach the substantial portion of the public interested in fire suppression.

Youth Engagement Specialist, Thea Garrett talks asks a young visitor about her experiences in nature. USDA Forest Service photo by Monique Duke.
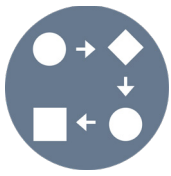
VI. Governance (1 Objective, 2 Outcomes)

Goal: Regional decision-making, roles and responsibilities, and workflows are consistent, transparent, and adhered to so as to achieve effective mission results.

> **Obj VI. 1: The Region's workflow processes and roles are evident through aligned governance mechanisms.**

Outcome A (3 yrs): The Regional Leadership Team **(RLT) functions under sound governance** practices.

Explanation: The intent is through the collaborative development of core governance documents, such as the Strategic Plan and the Charter, which direct the ongoing work of the RLT, the entire Region will benefit.

Outcome B (3 yrs): The Region's seven c**apacity areas are strengthened by governance,** as needed.

Explanation: Governance was identified as a key need in most of the capacity areas. The intent here is to improve the efficiency and agility of the Region's seven capacity areas by addressing governance needs across all areas in a holistic process.

Former Regional New Mexico State Liaison Ericka Luna is seen with her service dog Watson at the New Mexico State Capital Building in Santa Fe, NM, 2019. Forest Service photo by Andy McMillan, Team Pathways2Solutions.

VII. Knowledge (3 Objectives, 3 Outcomes)

Goal: The Region has the broad institutional knowledge required to face the range of changes and challenges, now and in its future.

Obj VII. 1: The Region understands its trust responsibility re: tribal sovereignty and how to fulfill it in the context of the Tribes and Pueblos located here.

Outcome A (3 yrs): The Forest Service's **trust responsibility** is understood as defined in existing policy and regulation and in the context of its application in this Region.

Explanation: From joint Secretarial Order No. 3403: "In managing Federal lands and waters, the Departments [DOI, USDA] are charged with the highest trust responsibility to protect Tribal interests and further the nation-to-nation relationship with Tribes." The intent of this outcome is that by gathering the available direction on our trust responsibility and interpreting it for its specific application in the Southwestern Region, the Region can then ensure that it is well understood and utilized by the workforce, which will be addressed in future outcomes.

Obj VII. 2: The Region incorporates Climate Change science and vocabulary, inclusive of Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge(*), in its land management decisions and activities.

Outcome B (3 yrs): Climate change science, as defined in the existing literature and place-based knowledge, is synthesized for its relevance to this Region.

Explanation: The intent here is that by assessing the body of knowledge in climate change, including Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK), for concepts and language appropriate to the Region, we can then ensure that it is incorporated into the scientific foundation of our decisions.

Obj VII. 3: The Region's leadership practices include governance principles and vocabulary.

Outcome C (5 yrs): The Region understands the **mechanics and vocabulary of governance** and how they apply in different contexts across the Region.

Explanation: Knowing how to assess and retool governance is key to effective leadership and business efficiency. The intent here is to build the Region's knowledge in this vital capacity area.
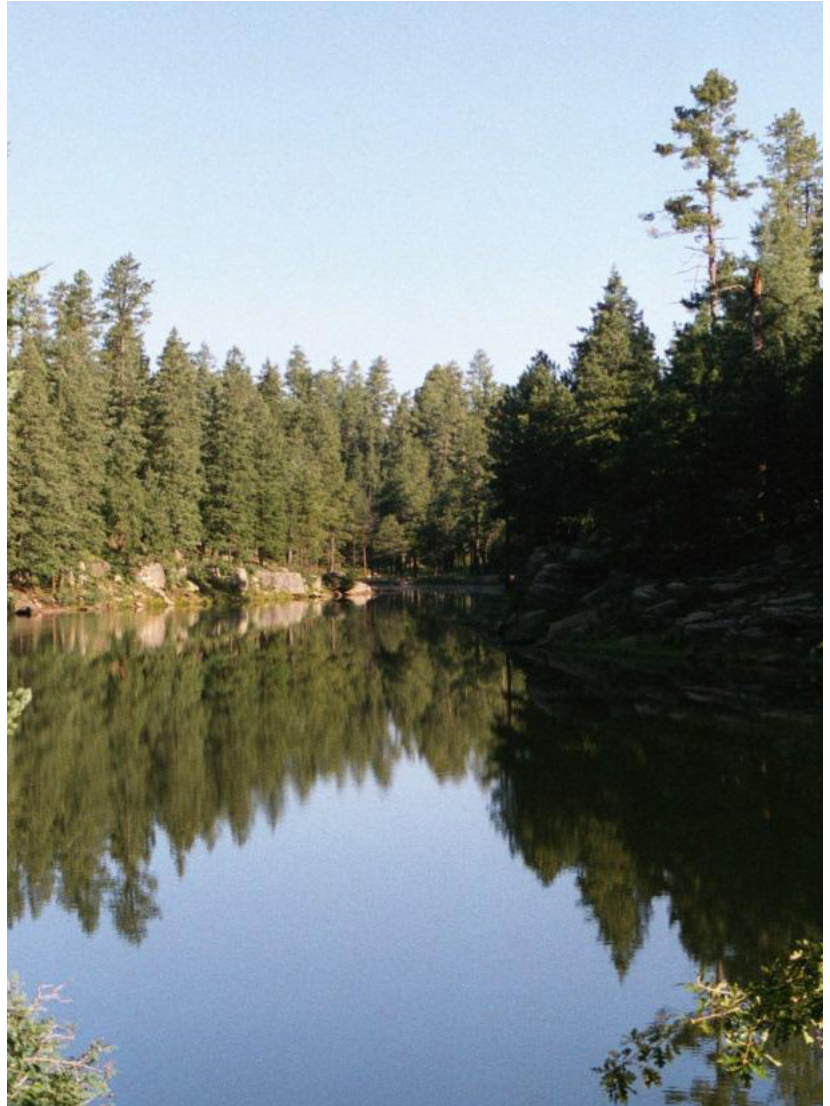
This Strategic Plan provides a comprehensive and forward-looking framework for the Region's work, as well as specific, accomplishable Outcomes to focus on for the next three to five years. These Outcomes are ambitious, as they need to be given the circumstances we face. Accomplishment of the Outcomes will require the concerted effort of all parts of the Southwestern Region, as well as adequate funding and clear budget direction. And to ensure ongoing focus and work on what the Strategic Plan outlines in the years to come, two levels of Regional leadership will be key: that of the Regional Leadership Team (RLT) and that of the Forest & Grassland units and the Regional Office (RO) programs.

In relation to the Plan, the RLT has an ongoing governing role. The Plan Outcomes are the shared destinations that the RLT established, and it is the RLT's responsibility to ensure progress is being made to reach them. This will require continuous evaluation of regionwide project reporting and collective discussion among the RLT to determine progress status and what more is required to maintain momentum. While it is important to track how many projects and dollars have been directed toward achieving each Outcome, real progress will be understood through monitoring of established Outcome Measures. Outcome Measures are quantifiable indicators of progress, as opposed to outputs of action.

Woods Canyon, Apache Sitgreaves National Forest, USDA Forest Service photo.

For example, Outcome A under Regional Vitality reads: Forest structure in priority firesheds is such that fire behavior is within its desired regime. Monitoring numbers of projects that address forest structure, including their location and number of acres, as well as dollars spent, is part of ensuring that the Region did expend effort on achieving the Outcome. However, none of these data are indicators that the Outcome has been achieved. To achieve this Outcome, forest structure in the identified high priority firesheds must become such that fire functions within the desired regime for the fireshed. The Outcome Measure will be established to directly indicate this.

Developing measures for each of the Strategic Plan Outcomes is a next step and key to enabling the RLT governing role in relation to the Plan. When Outcomes have been achieved, as determined by the Measures, the RLT is responsible both for commemorating completion and for developing the next Outcome leading to the longer-term Plan Objectives. In this way, the RLT ensures that the Strategic Plan is a living and adapting framework, serving the Region far into the future.

The units and RO programs also have a fundamental role in relation to the Strategic Plan. Their role is to use the Strategic Plan Outcomes as the basis for developing their annual program of work. This is not to say that units and RO programs will exclusively use the Strategic Plan, but rather, that the Strategic Plan outcomes will serve as an overarching filter, providing a structure for each unit and program to view its work. Other existing plans and strategies will provide further detail in the development of the program of work.

A year or two will be required to move the entire Region to this way of approaching the program of work, but even in the first year (2022), units and RO programs can crosswalk their program of work with the Strategic Plan Outcomes and identify which Outcomes can be moved forward through existing efforts. Further, this identification will enable the units and RO programs to adjust 2022 work where possible to achieve greater gains on multiple Outcomes in the Strategic Plan.

In year two and beyond, mapping of the Strategic Plan Mission Outcomes (both at the unit level and for the Region at large) to identify locations of high value where multiple Outcomes may be achieved will also direct the development of the program of work. In each unit, there will be locations where multiple Outcomes can be achieved – developing projects in these areas that address the various Outcomes involved will result in greater efficiency in our work. For example, overlaying priority firesheds (Obj I. 1. Outcome A) with priority watersheds (Obj II. 1. Outcome A) and those shared with sovereign entities (Obj III. 1. Outcome A) would enable units to identify locations where these different Outcomes overlap, and thus, design projects to address them together for increased efficiency.

Volunteers working on a trail extension project on the Cibola National Forest, USDA Forest Service photo by Kerry Wood.

Additionally, the Region has already developed a wide range of resources to support implementation of the Mission Outcomes. These existing resources are provided in the Appendix of this Plan, not as a comprehensive list but as an initial set of tools available as a starting point for Outcome implementation.

The lands we steward and the people we work with and serve face unprecedented challenges, now and in the coming decades. The Region's Strategic Plan represents a new layer of governance, providing overarching direction for the unit and RO program level program of work. The intention is to bring a focus, shared across the Region, to the work we do so that we may together accomplish more. With the Strategic Plan, the Region has the framework to achieve lasting gains on the landscape, sustaining the Forests and Grasslands of the Southwestern Region and benefiting the entire southwest.

Appendices

Acronym List

BAM – Budget Accountability and Modernization

DOI – Department of the Interior

EAP – Ecosystem Analysis & Planning

ERI – Ecological Restoration Institute

FAM – Fire & Aviation Management

FFH – Forestry & Forest Health

FIA – Forest Inventory & Analysis

GAOA – Great American Outdoors Act

IIJA – Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

INREV – Institute of Natural Resources Existing Vegetation

ITEK – Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge

LiDAR – Light Detection and Ranging

NAU – Northern Arizona University

NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act

NRM - Natural Resource Manager

OHV – Off-Highway Vehicle

PhoDAR - a term that joins the words "photography" and "LiDAR"

POC – Point of Contact

RMRS – Rocky Mountain Research Station

RNA – Research Natural Area

RO – Regional Office (as distinct from "the Region," which refers collectively to all the units and the RO of the Southwestern Region)

ST-Sim - an open-source SyncroSim Base Package for creating and running spatially-explicit simulation models of landscape change

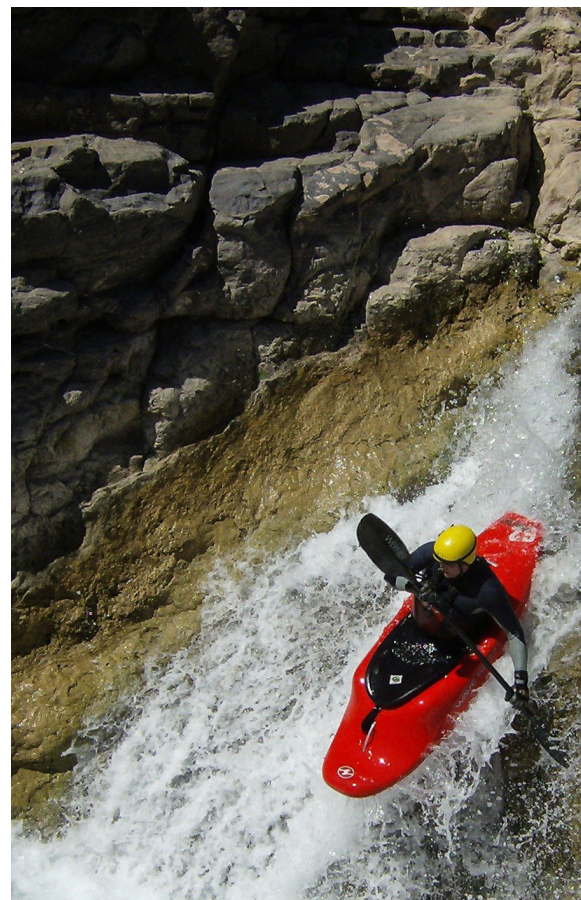**T&E** – Threatened and Endangered

USDA – United States Department of Agriculture

US Forest Service – the United States Forest Service, under the USDA

WIT – Watershed Improvement Tracking

WFRPRM - Wildlife, Fish, Rare Plants & Rangeland Management

WO – Washington Office

Kayaker on the Coconino National Forest, USDA Forest Service photo

Key Terms Defined

Budget direction – the annual instruction developed by the Region to ensure understanding and consistent implementation of the year's funding and fiscal reporting. The units and programs use the budget direction as the basis for developing their Program of Work. See Program of Work in the Strategic Plan Model on page 41.

Burnout operation – a burnout operation is done to remove the unburned fuel (which can be thousands of acres) between the containment line and the fire edge to reduce this potential. Burning out allows better control over the intensity of the wildfire against the containment line.

Climate Adaptation Strategy – the Region's official approach to incorporating climate change impacts in landscape prioritization and project planning.

Disadvantaged communities – as defined in Executive Order #14008, include, but are not limited to, those that are: low income, high and/or persistent poverty; high unemployment and underemployment; racial and ethnic residential segregation, particularly where the segregation stems from discrimination by government entities; linguistic isolation; high housing cost burden and substandard housing; distressed neighborhoods; high transportation cost burden and/or low transportation access; disproportionate environmental stressor burden and high cumulative impacts; limited water and sanitation access and affordability; disproportionate impacts from climate change; high energy cost burden and low energy access; jobs lost through the energy transition, access to healthcare. (See also Underserved communities)

Developed Recreation – activities that take place in facilities, including campgrounds, group areas, and day-use sites.

Dispersed Recreation – activities that take place outside of developed recreation sites. As a management practice, the Region may designate dispersed recreation sites and activities.

Experimental Controls – techniques utilized to minimize the influence of extraneous experience and environmental variables.

Geologic Age – a unit of geological time during which a system of rocks formed. Although still under review by the International Commission on Stratigraphy, which oversees the official geologic time chart, the current Holocene age is considered at an end. The new Anthropocene age represents the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment, and work is underway to determine the official time demarcation between the Holocene and the Anthropocene.

Governance – the structure and system of decision-making that provides coherence to a group of people.

Grassland(s) and grassland(s) – when Grassland(s) is capitalized, it refers to the Southwestern Region's land designation and ecosystem; when grassland(s) is not capitalized, it refers to the general ecosystem type.

Headwaters – the source of a river or stream; also, water source.

Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) – the evolving knowledge acquired by indigenous peoples over millennia through direct contact with the environment. See also Place-based experience.

Industry – refers to an area or type of business, such as land management, technology, banking, etc.

Living laboratory – in contrast to a traditional laboratory, operates in a real-life context with a user-centric approach.

Multiple use – as defined in the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960, management of all the various renewable surface resources of the national forests so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the needs of the American people; making the most judicious use of the land for some or all of these resources or related services over areas large enough to provide sufficient latitude for periodic adjustments in use to conform to changing needs and conditions.

Onboarding – the quantitative information an individual requires to begin work, such as passwords, compensation and benefits, office entry, etc.

Orientation – the qualitative information and training an individual or group of individuals requires to fulfill a role, including core responsibilities/authority, the overall context of the US Forest Service, the specific character of the Southwestern Region, and the resources, including technology, that are available, etc.

Physical assets – the Southwestern Region's land base, recreation infrastructure, administrative space, and the road/trail system.

Place-based experience – expertise that derives from interacting over time with a specific location. See also Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

Region vs. region – when Region is capitalized, it refers to the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service (not only to the Regional Office); when region is not capitalized, it refers to the geographic area of the southwest of the United States.

Sector – refers to one of the three primary sectors by which society and the economy often are divided: the private sector (business), the public sector (government) and the nonprofit sector (charitable organizations).

Southwestern vs. southwest – Southwestern refers to the US Forest Service Region; southwest refers to the geographic area of the United States.

Strategic Planning terms – see Strategic Planning Model on page 40.

Sustainability – avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance and ensure their availability into the future.

Sustainable – use of a resource such that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged.

Trust responsibility – the Supreme Court-determined special relationship between Tribes and the federal government that is a legally enforceable fiduciary obligation on the part of the United States to protect tribal treaty rights, lands, assets, and resources, as well as a duty to carry out the mandates of federal law with respect to all federally recognized American Indian Tribes.

Underrepresented populations – refers to subgroups of the population whose representation is disproportionately low in the Southwestern Region's workforce relative to their numbers in the general population of the region.

Underserved communities – as defined in Executive Order #13985, refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life; namely, these are Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality. (See also Disadvantaged communities)

Workforce – the full-time, part-time and seasonal employees, volunteers, contractors, and partners who conduct the work of the Southwestern Region.

Compilation of Existing Resources to Support Mission Outcome Implementation

Before the Region embarked on the development of this Strategic Plan, many important initiatives were undertaken that resulted in strategy and direction for the Region. Some of these include the Riparian Strategy, the Climate Adaptation Strategy, the Water Rights Strategy, the Sustainable Recreation Strategy, and Forest Plans. While the Strategic Plan sits above all of these, acting as an overarching framework within which they are represented, the Plan does not seek to supplant these efforts or documents. Instead, the Plan's implementation depends on them since they provide greater specificity than is useful in a Strategic Plan. For this reason, the Plan includes the following compilation of existing resources – guidance and tools, to incorporate and link them to the specific parts of the Plan to which they apply. The list here is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather, to represent some of the Region's major existing resources.

Note: In all cases, individual Forest Plans contain goals (Desired Conditions) and objectives that relate to the Region's Strategic Plan outcomes.

Focus Area I: Regional Vitality

Outcome A (5 yrs): Forest structure in *priority firesheds* is such that fire behavior is within its desired regime.

Implementation Resources:

- Regionwide Scenario Investment Planning: A proposed refined identification of priority firesheds providing Region-wide consistency with updated vegetation data and enhanced climate vulnerability projections. POCs: FFH and FAM.

- Project level vegetation structure: existing and projected future conditions. Support for landscape scale vegetation treatment projects using the Region 3 Analysis Framework. POC: FFH, FAM and EAP

Tracking Progress Resource:

- Existing vegetation mapping updates (INREV). POCs: Geospatial, EAP and FFH

Outcome B (3 yrs): Naturally intact desert areas are free from invasive grasses such that fire does not spread.

Implementation Resources:

- Invasive plants strategies, NEPA documents, Forest Plan Desired Conditions. POCs: Forest Planners, Range and Botanist Specialists. Numerous established partnerships exist in support of this work (by Forest Unit).

- The Region's Climate Adaptation Strategy and Climate Vulnerability Assessment. POC: EAP

- USDA Terrestrial Ecological Unit Inventory Technical Guide: Landscape and Land Unit Scales https://www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs_series/wo/wo_gtr068.pdf POC: EAP Soils

Tracking Resources:

- INREV (GIS Layer)
- Invasive Species Mapping on each Forest for NEPA

Outcome C (3 yrs): Opportunities provided by the Region to recreation businesses model innovative, sustainable practice around water use and impacts.

Implementation Resource:

- Socioeconomic Vulnerability to Ecological Changes in the Southwest: An All Lands Assessment (Dec 2021). Predicts how climate change is going to affect resource-based businesses. https://www.climatehubs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SocioeconomicVulnerabilitEcologicalChangesSW2021.pdf POC: EAP

Tracking Resource:

- Special Uses Data System (SUDS) POC: REC

Outcome D (5 yrs): The Region's public offerings (roads, trails, facilities) in high-use areas are sustainable and meet US Forest Service standards.

Implementation Resources:

- National Outdoor Recreation Strategy
- Southwestern Region Sustainable Recreation Strategy
- Forest Sustainable Recreation Action Plans

Outcome E (5 yrs): Adverse impacts from dispersed recreation in critical riparian T&E habitats are eliminated.

Implementation Resources:

- Southwestern Region Riparian and Aquatic Ecosystem Strategy. POCs: REC, RWFRP, EAP
- GeoRAP riparian restoration spatial planning tool. POCs: REC, RWFRP, EAP

Outcome F (5 yrs): Recreation opportunities are concentrated in the Urban Interface to minimize impacts to fragile desert ecosystem.

Implementation Resources (POC: REC):

- National Outdoor Recreation Strategy
- Southwestern Region Sustainable Recreation Strategy
- Forest Sustainable Recreation Action Plans

Outcome G (3 yrs): Management of allotments with T&E species habitat emphasizes the recovery and diversity of species.

Implementation Resources:

- USFWS Recovery Plans: https://www.fws.gov/program/recovery/recovery-plans POC WFRPRM
- R3 WFRPRM Sharepoint site: https://usdagcc.sharepoint.com/sites/fs-r03-wfrp/SitePages/Home.aspx

Tracking Resource:

- Natural Resource Manager (NRM) http://fsweb.nrm.fs.fed.us/

Outcome H (5 yrs): Unauthorized livestock are removed from the Region where there are impacts to T&E species and/or habitat.

Implementation Resources:

- POC: WFRPRM

Tracking Resource:

- Natural Resource Manager (NRM) fsweb.nrm.fs.fed.us

 # Focus Area II: National Prosperity

Outcome A (5 yrs): Priority watersheds identified in the Watershed Condition Framework are producing increased water quality and quantity.

Implementation Resource:

- Watershed Restoration Action Plans. POC: EAP
- Water Rights and Uses (WRU) Database in NRM
- USGS Water Data: https://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis

Tracking Resource:

- Watershed Improvement Tracking (WIT) database IT database. POC: EAP

Outcome B (5 yrs): The Region's wood products advance emerging markets for underutilized material.

Implementation Resources:

- POC: Cooperative Forestry, Regional Wood Innovations Program
- Socioeconomic Vulnerability to Ecological Changes in the Southwest: An All Lands Assessment https://www.climatehubs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SocioeconomicVulnerabilitEcologicalChangesSW2021.pdf

Tracking Resource:

- FIA Timber Products Output reports. POC: FFH

Outcome C (3 yrs): Affected watersheds are the focus of shared reclamation and restoration outcomes.

Implementation Resources:

- POS: Lands and Minerals

Outcome D (5 yrs): Rural communities have access to broadband.

   Implementation Resources:

- POC: Lands and Minerals

Outcome E (5 yrs): Saguaro Cactus population increases to the level that sustains the ecosystem.

   Implementation Resources:

- Desired Conditions and Objectives for Sonoran Desert Ecosystems in Tonto, Coronado and Prescott National Forest Plans.
- Invasive plants strategies, NEPA documents, Forest Plan DCs and Objectives from Tonto, Coronado and Prescott National Forests.
- Terrestrial Ecological Unit Inventory. POCs: EAP, Forest specialists
- The Region's Climate Adaptation Strategy and Climate Vulnerability Assessment. POC: EAP

Focus Area III: International Ecological Connection

Outcome A (5 yrs): Watersheds shared with Tribal Nations, Pueblos, land grant communities, acequias and Mexico are in optimal functioning condition.

   Implementation Resource:

- The Region's Climate Adaptation Strategy and Climate Vulnerability Assessment. POC: EAP, Tribal Relations Specialists
- Automated Lands Program (ALP) database. POC: Lands
- Regional GIS Library. POC: Geospatial Services. In the future a SW Regional map of these locations will be created.

   Tracking Resource:

- Watershed Improvement Tracking (WIT) database. POC: EAP

Outcome B (4 yrs): Key grassland wildlife habitat is connected across jurisdictional boundaries.

   Implementation Resources:

- Habitat connectivity assessments POC: WFRPRM
- Plan components from individual Forest Plans

Outcome C (5 yrs): Key areas at risk for type conversion from high-severity burns are reforested.

Implementation Resources:

- The Region's Climate Adaptation Strategy and Climate Vulnerability Assessment. POC: EAP
- BAER Imagery Support Data: https://burnseverity.cr.usgs.gov/baer/
- National Burn Severity Portal: https://burnseverity.cr.usgs.gov/

Outcome D (3 yrs): Eastern red cedar populations are eliminated in Grassland riparian areas.

Implementation Resource:

- Cibola Grasslands Forest Plan, Desired Conditions and Objectives for grasslands and riparian areas. POCs: WFRPRM and Cibola NF Grassland Specialists

Outcome E (5 yrs): Unintended physical barriers to aquatic T&E species movement and dispersal are modified to allow passage.

Implementation Resource:

- GeoRAP Riparian Restoration Project Planning Tool. POC: EAP
- Aquatic Organism Passage https://usdagcc.sharepoint.com/sites/fs-r03-ee/EngineeringOperations/Transportation/SitePages/TransAOP.aspx POC: WFRPRM, ENG
- Aquatic Barrier Prioritization Tool https://connectivity.sarpdata.com/ POC WFPRM, EAP
- Aquatic Riparian Inventory, POC: EAP

Outcome F (5 yrs): Soils are stable near springs, playas and streams.

Implementation and Tracking Resource:

- Terrestrial Ecosystem Unit Inventory. POC: EAP Soils

Outcome G (5 yrs): Historic flyways are unencumbered to provide for successful migrations.

Implementation Resources:

- USFS Forest Legacy Program https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/private-land/forest-legacy POC: Cooperative Forestry Program
- Partners in Flight (PIF) https://partnersinflight.org/
- The Central Flyway Council https://centralflyway.org/

Outcome H (2 yrs): Smoke transport and burn intensity are priority considerations in burnout operations.

Implementation Resources:

- Incident Meteorologist information on transport winds. POC: FAM
- Smoke sensitive areas mapping (e.g., schools, hospitals, and Class I Areas). POC: FAM

Tracking Resource:

- Wildfire Decision Support System (WFDSS) could be used to document that transport was considered prior to ignition and also to pre-populate smoke sensitive areas. POC: FAM

Strategic Planning Model

Written by Rebecca Reynolds, used with permission.

The Southwestern Region's Strategic Plan was developed using the strategic planning model provided by Rebecca Reynolds Consulting (RRC). This model is explained in brief here, with definitions of key planning terms used in the development of this strategic plan.

More information is available at https://www.rebeccareynoldsconsulting.com/rrc-strategic-planning-model.html.

The RRC Strategic Planning model utilizes common strategic planning elements, such as vision and mission, but RRC specifically defines each and then describes the relationship between them. For example, while the vision and mission statements address different questions, they work together in providing a conceptual frame for the work of the planning entity. Therefore, it is both the strategic plan elements and their relationship to each other that make the strategic plan meaningful. These relationships are depicted in the diagram below (Figure 1).
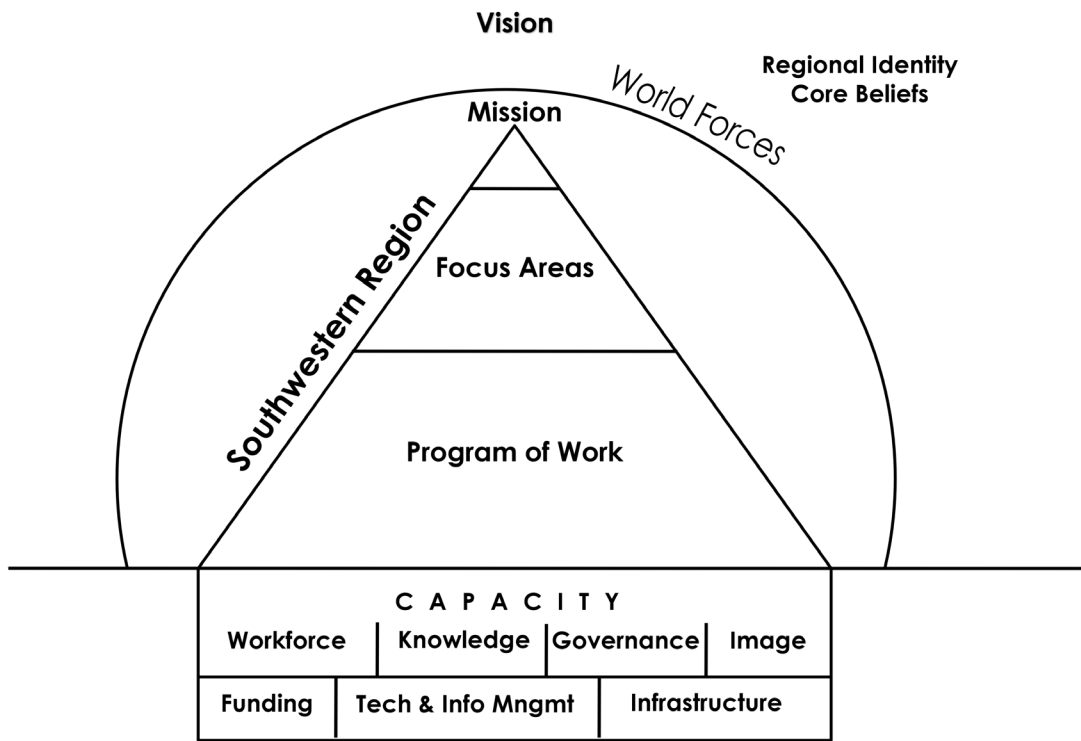

Figure 1. Depiction of the Southwestern Region's strategic plan structure showing the relationship between different elements of the Plan. Adapted for the Southwestern Region's Strategic Plan from the RRC Strategic Framework Diagram, ©2009, used with permission.

RRC Strategic Planning Model Terms Defined

In addition to the diagram elements, definitions of other related concepts/terms are included here.

Vision: the organization's highest-level goal, its desired future, the answer to the question "why does the organization exist?"

Belief: what the organization believes about the world and how it works that informs its choice of mission; the answer to "what beliefs are fundamental to the organization's work?"

Mission: the organization's highest-level activity, i.e., what does the organization do and for whom?

Mission work: the activities undertaken that collectively accomplish the mission. (See Program of Work)

World Force: those circumstances and trends that have an impact on the organization and its work.

Identity: the geographic, cultural and social nature of the organization, and the enduring standards of behavior that the organization considers essential to its character, heritage and legacy.

Organizing Principle: the basis for the structure of the organization's mission work and areas of focus, e.g., geography, customer, aspect of mission, etc. The organization chooses its organizing principle to support the mindset most advantageous to the situation it faces, as well as to create greater emphasis on certain aspects of its work.

Focus Area: one of the organization's major areas of concentration of its mission work.

Program of Work: all of the work the organization does to further its mission; the activities it does to serve its constituency (as distinguished from capacity work that it does to support itself).

Capacity: all of the resources and capability the organization has and needs to deliver its mission, organized into seven discrete areas: Workforce, Funding, Technology & Information Management, Infrastructure, Image, Governance, and Knowledge.

Capacity Work: the activities undertaken that collectively build capacity.

Goal: the condition when the problem is solved or the need is met (i.e., the desired future).

Objective: an aspect of the goal, usually smaller in scope and achievable in a specific timeframe.

Outcome: an aspect of the objective, smaller in scope and achievable in a shorter timeframe than the objective's, in this case, 3-5 years.

Program (a.k.a. Activities, Means, Tactics): the action taken to move from the current state to the goal/objective (the desired future).

Outcome Measure: the tangible evidence that progress is being made toward achieving the goal/objective.

Output or Performance Measure: the quantifiable evidence that specific action was taken.

Relationship between Strategic Plan Elements

One of the challenges to strategic planning is the language used in the planning discussion. Too often the elements of a strategic plan are not consistently defined and understood, making the delineation of those elements in the leadership conversation murky at best. The RRC diagram, together with the planning term definitions, acts both as a visual map of the planning territory and as a conversation guide. If two people are conversing, and one is talking at the vision level while another is responding at the program of work level, this can appear to be a disconnect or even conflict. The RRC diagram enables groups to daylight what element of the plan is being discussed and to understand the relationship between the different elements.

In the diagram, the vision is shown at the top to represent its aspirational and future oriented qualities. The entity that is conducting the planning is represented by the triangle, which is surrounded by the world, indicating the dynamic set of forces having an impact on the organization. The triangle's point is the mission statement that expresses in clear, simple language what the organization does to work toward the realization of the vision.

The triangle rests on its foundation. The foundation represents the organization's capability in seven core areas that enable it to actualize its mission and mission-related (i.e., customer-focused) work. The foundation is underground to show that this part of the strategic plan is about the needs of the organization, as opposed to the work it does to serve its customers. Organizational capacity, while essential to the organization, is largely invisible to its public.

Finally, the RRC Strategic Planning model incorporates accountability by establishing priorities through outcomes, which are then monitored through quantitative measures of progress. Outcomes are not methods or tactics, but rather clear destinations achievable in a specified timeframe. Outcomes enable those working to reach them the ability to determine the best methods to use.

A common pitfall in formulating progress indicators toward outcomes is measuring the output of the work activity used to move toward the outcome, rather than measuring actual progress toward the outcome. This is akin to the difference between a global positioning device and an automobile odometer: one shows exact location, a direct indication of proximity to a destination, while the other indicates tire revolutions translated into miles, not a measure of being any closer to a destination. For this reason, the RRC model focuses leadership attention on formulating measures that will show progress toward the outcome.

The RRC Strategic Planning model can be used for any level of an organization. When using the RRC model for different leadership levels, it is useful to consider the leadership level above so that appropriate linkage can be made. For instance, the US Forest Service mission statement is a leadership level above the Region's mission statement. Therefore, not only must the two statements be compatible, they should also reflect this relationship. Tiered plans based on a common conceptual model such as RRC's enables large organizations to synchronize between leadership levels and functional areas for increased efficiency and productivity.

Kanab Creek Wilderness, Kaibab National Forest. USDA Forest Service photo.

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